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NEW INTER-PARTY RELATIONS OF THE HUNGARIAN SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY AFTER THE PRAGUE SPRING

The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the establishment of the theoretical base and frontiers of Eurocommunism

At the 40th anniversary of the 1968 events the effects of the reforms created by the Prague Spring and the consequences of the Soviet military intervention are rightly discussed extensively. The present study would like to introduce a so far less examined topic, the reaction of West European, especially the Italian and French communist parties, the beginning of their gradual disaffection from the Soviet Union and their search for an alternative way, which featured the leftist and anti-capitalist movements in the 1960s. The breakaway from the Stalinist past, as well as its political content, were at stake.

The program and the new orientation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), headed by Alexander Dubček who stood for *socialism with a human face*, nourished hope for Western communist parties that there was hope to change and reform “Eastern systems”. The communist parties of Italy, France and Spain, which would later establish *eurocommunism*, were now able to represent a joint platform: strictly rejecting all arguments for the need for a Soviet intervention proposed by the Soviets and their allies in the region – contrary to their different opinions on the 1956 revolution in Hungary. While these parties tried to explain the 1956 events in Budapest and the Tito-Stalin split as advances of right-wing revisionism, and interpreted the sins of Stalin as results of the confused paranoiac mind of a dictator but putting an artificial end from outside to the reforms in Prague, which were also popular at their home, and the recurring harsh intervention in the life of a sovereign country became a dividing line in the relationship between European communists and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Western communists mostly raised three questions: 1. What kind of people are leading the Soviet Union, in fact? 2. How can these corrupt leaders match the opening and new style in Soviet politics – allegedly in the pipeline – with suppressing a communist experience which was based on democratic and pluralistic principles

while not questioning the leading role of the single-party running the state? 3. According to their experience, rulers in Moscow had made a series of mistakes, and their attitude and guidelines given by them had not changed a lot over the years passed. Is the superpower that theoretically confronted the heritage of Stalin really a post-Stalinist state? Could the idea of Soviet superpower give up its insistence on hierarchical power structures, and understand the importance of differences arising from the different historical-economical developments?

The unexpected application of the “Brezhnev doctrine” further undermined the already gradually weakening ideological links of the Italian and French communists to Moscow. Several members of the Spanish communist party, which was forced into illegality by the Franco regime, gained refuge in Prague. Their political activities, including the operation of a radio station, were organised from here. They were participating in the public life lead by the KSČ and felt personally the approval of and popular support to the reforms. Of course, similar to the Italian and the French communist parties (PCI and PCF) they did not accept the Soviet doctrine of the *casus belli*, that is the reference to imperialism and counter-revolution that was repeated every time with little content. The PCI and PCF saw that the superpowers were coming closer, thus also utilising the safety of Western democracies and their economic development they became the opinion leaders in strictly condemning the August 1968 military action. The dissent group spearheading the need for a different way of socialist development and advocating full independence of communist parties and countries had not yet arrived to announce *eurocommunism* but its main lines had been shaped. About this period, these parties dropped the exclusive power of the proletariat, the need for the one-party system and the party as the ruling elite from their program – mostly due to the bitter experience of the Prague spring and the following autumn. Although they were not able to go further that time but they succeeded in postponing the scheduled next, Moscow meeting and consultation of communist and workers’ parties. They made trouble, although marginally. This was specially reflected in the relationship and links of the PCI and the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP), in a period when Hungary was engaged in decisive reforms in the form of launching the *new economic mechanism*. Related documents produced by the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of MSZMP depicted a changing relationship between Western communist ideas and the forced reality of the actually existing socialism shaped from Moscow.

The PCI and the invasion in Czechoslovakia

The PCI strongly opposed the Soviet intervention. Naturally, reflecting the openness of this party, certain counter-opinions were also expressed but the youth organisations of the party also joined the platform judging the elimination of the Prague spring as negative development. Secretary Luigi Longo made his related account at the meeting of the Central Committee on August 28, 1968. His report was discussed a day later both by the Central Committee and the Central Supervisory Committee a day later – at closed meetings. They concluded that there was not any moment when the possibility for capitalist restoration was open, this was specially stressed by Paolo Bufalini, and there was not any actual imperialist threat: “dissonant voices and anti-socialism were isolated, and leaders of the KSČ fully controlled the situation.”¹ Among the makers of nationwide politics in PCI, Giancarlo Pajetta and Giorgio Amendola raised objection against the measures of Moscow. Both agreed with the report presented by Longo. Amendola highlighted that the present stand of Italian communists had been in harmony with their activities both during the period of antifascist fight and over the 23 years passed after. He pointed to the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti to be followed, especially stressing on the given situation the Yalta memoirs of the latter. He ended his argument with the following remark: “*we cannot expect that the emancipation from capitalist exploitation will be brought about world campaigns, as the Chinese communists want, or this can be achieved by actions of socialist countries, as Soviet comrades – as it seems – think.*”²

Pajetta expressed that they reached a compromise in Moscow but had not signed a pact. This differentiation was very important for Italian communists. Nevertheless, this compromise prevented a catastrophe. In fact, the unity of the leading group of KSČ surmounted those who believed that this unity was over. Pajetta considered positive that in addition to the Italian communist party several other ones, including the French, Finnish, Spanish, Scandinavian and Japanese parties distanced themselves from the Soviet intervention. All supported the proposal of PCI to establish a broader opposition in international (communist) organisations, with the not concealed goal to prevent in the future – or by other words to veto – the political-military steps of certain socialist

¹ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1968. 167. 41.

² Ibid. 40.

countries – especially the Soviet Union – which violate the basic values of the international labour movement.

According to them, the intervention of the Warsaw Pact represented the logic of blocks and wanted to break the process of rebirth: the first attempt to make Eastern bloc countries – where private property of means of labour was abolished – aware of the contradictions within their societies and try to settle these contradictions in a fair manner within the basic power structure.³ Their starting point was, unquestionably, commitment for the communist party, the socialist way and the democratic rebirth of the socialist society (and its future stabilisation). They believed that despite the difficult situation the KSČ would regain its independence and its full freedom in decisions that would forward the idea of a renewal of the socialist society, while they would strictly *protect socialist achievements against any risk and any attempt to abolish them*.⁴

“In order to advance toward this direction, we turn with a request to the concerned parties and governments, especially to the CPSU and the government of the Soviet Union, to make all necessary measures to restore ordinary life in Czechoslovakia by the withdrawal of the troops. In our opinion, this is the first step that should be done in order to heal wounds, and to make internal relations within the community of socialist countries the base for improving cooperation in all fields and strengthening real unity – respecting the independence and sovereignty of each country. (...) It is necessary to find the way and form, meanwhile respecting the autonomy and independence of each party, to set *joint points and goals* for the West-European communist parties.”⁵

They considered holding the next meeting of communist and workers parties useless until the situation in Czechoslovakia was settled finally and reassuring. Naturally, Longo rejected the criticism of Ambrogio Donini⁶, who expressed his discontent in his speech with the party leadership opposing the intervention of the five countries in Czechoslovakia and who underlined that this strengthens the bourgeois propaganda.

It is worth to cite the words of Longo again, who excellently managed the crisis, on the one hand rejecting the accusations of the Italian socialists and

³ Ibid. 41. (in italics, underlined in the original with a remark added: „if it were so”)

⁴ Ibid. 45-46. (remark: „= no”)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Marxist historian (1903–1991). He was a lecturer in Rome in 1926–1928 and later in Bari 1960–1971, ambassador to Poland in 1947 and PCI-delegated member of the Senate in 1953–1963.

social democrats and on the other hand distancing himself and his party from the Soviets. "Actual considerations concerning the situation in Czechoslovakia, according to our opinion, cannot be separated from those theoretical motivations, which urged us to clearly reject the military intervention. These theoretical motivations – on the fundamentals of which all our theoretical work and politics are built – are based on the respect of the autonomy of each communist party and each country, as a consequence of which is that *the development of the socialist democracy should not be broken.*"⁷

Further keywords of his speech were to improve the respect for the Soviet Union and the endeavour towards peaceful coexistence. By this, he criticised again – indirectly – the Prague intervention, and was speaking about the drop in the prestige of the big brother in the East. It is important to underline that he did not split with Moscow, but demonstrating the independence of the PCI he dared to express sharp criticism. The politics of the party was built on the Gramsci-Togliatti ideological axe and the basic principles announced at the 20th Congress, thus making obvious the "betrayal" of the foreign policy of Leonid Brezhnev and Andrei Gromyko.

"Well, we have to tell that the intervention in Czechoslovakia is opposing this political line; it opposes main problems of articulating political and civil life; opposes facing and fighting this line in socialist countries or limiting it in any way – as well as all other tendencies to intervene, even military, in the internal affairs of other parties or countries."⁸ The basic elements of the solution proposed by the PCI were an analytical examination of the situation and harmonised international (foreign) policy. They wanted to reposition the Italian communist party on the map of international labour movements: stressing several times the voluntarily feature of the Western communist movement, where its support and (political) strength could be measured by democratic methods. The rearrangement of the power structure, the advance harmonisation of foreign policy moves, would deprive Moscow from its advantages that were almost considered as natural, and would question its political monopoly in the Warsaw Pact. As a result, Longo – if he could – referred to the results of the Karlovy Vary Conference, because no other communist party, especially in the East, had been so brave and creative over the period since then, proposing a realistic analysis of the situation. The political passivity of the really existing

⁷ Ibid. 47. (remark: „Not even they know what it is!”)

⁸ Ibid. 48.

socialism suppressed all initiatives for change. “What is the reason for this smaller drive, which sometimes makes the impression that socialist countries in Europe are rather waiting for changes than initiating them or taking a proactive position? This is a topic that obviously requires deeper analysis. Without trying to give a complete answer, we can say that this *lack of initiatives* is rooted in an explanation of the situation, according to which *imperialism has not become stronger but is more aggressive*. It is unquestionable that imperialism steadily continues its attacks. We know it very well, since we have to fight its propaganda and the different forms of its ideological activity every day. (...) Nevertheless, we always pay attention *not to consider persons who express one or other aspects of the capitalist and neo-capitalist ideology as agents of imperialism*. We always pay attention to making ideological gains with our actions, trusting in the validity and vitality of Marxism. And we do this with results in a country, where the determining majority of communication tools – starting with the most popular these days the television – are controlled by our enemies.”⁹

Longo applied skilful the concepts of political opponent and enemy. Concerning mass media, he spoke of enemies, in order to stage the situation better, but concerning international politics he used the less dividing term of opponents, without referring to actual countries or military alliance. Thus in many cases, the context reveals that it is the Soviet Union, which is represented by the actual political opponent. According to them, the democratic unity, which is based on debates, cannot be bureaucratic at all.

Freely interpreting Togliatti, Longo pointed out several times that since the Yalta process they had received little help to present the ideological base-lines of the 20th Congress, especially (little) from countries where counterpart communist parties controlled social life completely. “Furthermore, we got the impression that this help is especially diminishing by a phenomenon called ideological aggression. The necessary and indispensable lessons should be different, profoundly different, that all communist and workers parties should learn from the mistake of the military intervention in Czechoslovakia. We expect greater momentum in foreign policy – concerning Europe – in the fight for security and overcoming political blocks.”¹⁰

⁹ Ibid. 50–51. (remark: „According to this we do not trust in ourselves, we overestimate the aggressiveness of imperialists and we consider all indifferently as opponents.”)

¹⁰ Ibid. 51.

At the same time, to obviously demonstrate his loyalty to the community of Marxists-Leninists – he still considered – led by Moscow, Longo also condemned the US aggression against Vietnam. With skilled tactics he did not make parallel between the two military actions (although this analogy was attractive, despite their substantial differences) but used both sorrowful actions as a critique of the politics of international security, or more precisely the two large opposing military blocks.

The representative of the MSZMP, Hungary's Ambassador to Italy József Száll¹¹ met Carlo Galuzzi and other members of the Central Committee of the PCI but due to long discussions the report on his visit was written only on August 31, 1968.¹² Italian communists made all their best to maintain relationships with their East-European counterparties, including the Hungarian one. It is likely that they were aware of the attitude of János Kádár at his meetings in Komárom and Ágcsernyő, where he supported his fresh ally Dubček also warning him to be moderate and cautious. Bilateral connections of the PCI were frozen only with the GDR. Both Budapest and Rome knew that events were developing on diverted paths. Both considered that the situation in Czechoslovakia could be normalised by renewed talks and compromising negotiations.

From the report of Száll, it is obvious that the PCI got up-to-date information from events in Prague, thus they were able to develop an opinion independently from the news flow by TASS. The PCI sent its old and well experienced members to spend their holidays in Czechoslovakia, and they reported experiences different from the announcements made by the “five” invaders. *“They have not seen any trace of the counter-revolutionary threat.”*¹³ The Italians objected that they had not received advance information from the Soviets thus the military action found them unprepared. They also questioned the Soviet announcement objecting the lack of the leading role of the KSČ, since the leadership of the party still was respected by masses to a certain extent during the crisis, and it was able to control the country and its own political work.

¹¹ Former communist politician, diplomat (1921–2004). From 1962 to 1970 he served as the Hungarian Ambassador to Italy. In 1970 he was accused of spying for foreign governments such as West Germany, Italy, and the United States. With his family he never returned to Budapest.

¹² Ibid. 53–58.

¹³ Ibid. 54.

On the international scene, the invasion in Prague helped Richard Nixon to win elections, made the future complicated for Cuba, and hindered the solution of the Vietnam question. After the military action of the five countries, chances to advance in improving the security in Europe were reduced, and the enforcement of the decrees made in Karlovy Vary was questioned. The fight for dissolving military blocks strictly lost its all hopes. Italians considered the damage made to the international labour movement even more serious, since they expected rightly that the prestige of the Soviet Union would drop globally. Leaders of the PCI classified the measures exclusively as personal faults of the Soviet leadership thus preventing party members and others “to raise questions about the feature of the system, and identifying it with the actions made, which were – according to them – unnecessary and wrongly timed.”¹⁴

The Moscow meeting was taken off from the agenda completely. The parties of the “four” minor allies of the invaders could be isolated at least partially, thus giving more room for the Chinese and their supporters – argued Galuzzi.

Italians found especially harmful the aftermath of the crisis developed after the events in Czechoslovakia on Italian internal politics. They were afraid of losing further votes, and of a united front developing from Christian democrats to socialists against them, which could undermine the popularity of the party and might hinder the PCI to become a constructive member of the ruling majority in the Parliament thus actively promoting different aspects of social development in Italy.

At the moment of the invasion in Prague, Pajetta and Longo were in Moscow, while Amendola was in Bulgaria. It is especially worth to mention that even in this locations they did not know anything about the military preparations against Czechoslovakia.

According to his report, personal feelings of Száll were anyhow positive on the steps made by the Italian communists. “The Italian party leadership is aiming to understand the situation better thus as a result to change its earlier opinion gradually and slowly.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, in Budapest leaders were aware that it would not pay off to increase tensions with Western, especially the Italian and French parties up to leading to a split. The Central Committee also felt the unwillingness of Hungarians in fulfilling their duties. The days and weeks

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. 55.

following the invasion were filled with debates on explaining and interpreting the events, several times with strictly opposing views and palliations. In a strictly military sense, the Soviet action of occupation was well prepared and successful but at the same time foreign policy leaders in Moscow had again been proven incompetent in mitigating the damage in prestige – if there were any chance to prepare for that. Nevertheless, the Soviets should have to be very naïve to expect loyalty from the Western communist parties, when they started to distance themselves from Moscow, as well from Budapest, especially due to the “Prague autumn”. Limited by its room to manoeuvre, the leadership of MSZMP “followed” the changing PCI and PCF but its role subordinated to the USSR prevented the actual chance of a break-through.

Because Longo was not in Rome at the time of the invasion, the Political Bureau of the PCI maintained its earlier stand – in his the absence. This, according to Száll, could have been also influenced by the fact that “the situation in Czechoslovakia has not settled at all, the talks in Moscow have not ended and they had no information on the outlook of its development.”¹⁶

After the “agreement reached by negotiations” in Moscow, Longo slightly altered his opinion and the stand of his party. In his account made at the Central Committee, which was presented also by the Hungarian state news agency MTI, he expressed the need for solidarity with the East European communist parties but at the same time he repeated the earlier announcement of his party made on the August 21 events. The PCI refreshed the idea of solidarity, because it was afraid of a possible anti-communist campaign in Italy and in the West. They underlined the importance of the often mentioned fight against Atlanticism and reaction forces, although they were urged soon to team up with the Christian democrats by the lessons learnt from the Soviet intervention.

In the words of Száll: “My personal belief is that the concluding speech of comrade Longo held at the Central Committee has signs of certain development further [in the right direction]. We have to judge also positively that based on the guidelines of the Central Committee, the Political Bureau has decided to exchange views with leaders of the important communist parties, including the ones which took part in the action in Czechoslovakia.”¹⁷ The Hungarian foreign politician was keen on mentioning that all ambassadors of socialist

¹⁶ Ibid. 56.

¹⁷ Ibid.

countries in Rome had similar interpretation of the events as Budapest and the PCI was mostly annoying the Soviet diplomats – which can easily be understood. Nevertheless, he made no comments concerning the Embassy of Prague.

Concerning the internal fight in the PCI, the MSZMP was mostly interested in Amendola gaining more power, who – according to Száll – subordinated the “international duties” of his party under Italian internal policy interests. “His standpoint is mostly formed by the expected reaction of other Italian parties to his statements, whether these announcements improve or damage the connections of the party to socialist and Catholic masses established during the elections. That is why *they avoid or even ignore the larger historical context and the needs of the international labour movement*. This kind of critique is obviously right and can be agreed with.”¹⁸

Száll repeatedly underlined the influence of the PCI in the West, since he was well aware that left movements in the Mediterranean area were more influenced by Longo than by Brezhnev of the far away Moscow – especially after the Prague spring. The PCI “which was so far the most important base of socialist ideas and human development in the capitalist world, thus *the reunification with this party is an unavoidable historical necessity*.”¹⁹

Although argumentations of the two parties were strictly opposite, they tried to do all – also based on the proposals made by Száll – to “restore the unity on theoretical foundations, abolishing the sorrowful split.” Inner circles of the MSZMP were right to hope again that the situation would get a positive turn, since the PCI had a history of revising – at least partially – its earlier standpoints, like it did concerning 1956. Based on this hope, Pajetta who visited Budapest in the second week of September 1968 was received at the highest level of the MSZMP.

In its classified report made on September 13, 1968, MTI mentioned the comment of AFP judging the visit of Pajetta and Armando Cossutta positive. AFP learnt that Hungarian and Romanian leaders tolerated the Italian opinions the most, according to which the normalisation in Czechoslovakia should be reached before the next meeting of the communist and workers parties in Moscow. Otherwise there was a threat that a split might develop in the already fragile unity of the labour movement. Italian communist leaders were satis-

¹⁸ Ibid. 57. Italics in original underlined in red, with a remark in ink on the margin: „He is right!”

¹⁹ Ibid. This section is emphasized with a double line at the margin.

fied that Romanians and Yugoslavs were supporting their proposals, and the Hungarian leadership was tolerating them with sympathy.²⁰

There were wide range reactions in the Italian press that Alexei Kosygin and Oldřich Černík had signed an agreement to keep Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. *Il Messaggero* even published an editorial on it under the title “The Last Chapter”. “With their presence in Prague the Soviets celebrated not only that they employed physical aggression against a nation with the help of tanks but also the renouncement of theoretical principles, promises and obligations which had been repeatedly announced over the preceding dozen years. They desecrated all that they had said since 1956 about the right for different ways leading to socialism, the independence of socialist countries, which was confirmed by Brezhnev himself two years ago.” According to *Tempo*, the short visit of Kosygin paid in Prague served only the approval of the gallows-tree agreement.²¹

The PCI held its congress in Bologna on January 26, 1969, which was featured by debates on the open problems (the decrees of Karlovy Vary, the abolition of blocks, the activity of China and the situation in Czechoslovakia). Alessandro Natta also contributed to the debate on the document made to prepare for the congress. According to him, the era of military blocks had ended, thus the creations of the cold war were obsolete. The politics of peaceful co-existence was based on the desire for and activity aiming the independence and autonomy of nations, the freedom of social and political choices and the free development of countries. Natta was dreaming about an Italian foreign policy which was fighting for the abolishment of blocks, including NATO. According to him, a centrist-left coalition is unfeasible and the time had come to establish a democratic alternative to it.²² Although Longo did not mention directly the

²⁰ Ibid. 59.

²¹ Ibid. 60.

²² Ibid. 60–61. The ideological aspect of the debate had also evolved. According to Cossutta, the concept of the unity in diversity should be cleared further, especially after the Czechoslovak events, as a result, uncertainty was detected at communist party cells. Pietro Ingrao, at the left wing of the party, proposed critical research in order to cast light on the relationship between democracy and socialism.

On October 19, Longo also expressed his views in the debate induced by the report of Natta. He rejected the critique that Marxism was a unified doctrine. Italians never used it as a dogma but as guidelines necessary for their political actions. The fact that Marxism had different local tones as it developed by “different realities” did not “shock” Italian communists rather they considered it as a “proof of its vitality and strength”.

crisis in Czechoslovakia but he made strong remarks referring to the events happened just two months before. "In our movement, the actual problem emerging now is the ability to evaluate the differences in revolutionary processes with a historic and actual approach, that we can explore the common base of these revolutionary processes, without losing their sense. We should not let them suppressed by the differences and contradictions that emerge during revolutionary developments." Connected to this he aptly quoted Togliatti: "The communist movement should be united not only at the national but also at the international level. This unity can be reached in two ways. It can be the result of external pressure, the mechanic adoption of orders given by others and servile imitation. We reject that. On the other hand, *such a unity is also possible, which reflects the different experiences and uniqueness, which is nourished by mutual critical approach, and which is strengthened by the autonomy of the given parties.* We need this second type of unity. We should be united, because our principles are the same and we are following the same goals. Our unity is a model of the international society we are fighting for. Where all nations will be equal, free and brothers."²³

The lines above indicate that the future growing distance between the Soviet and Italian communists, the birth of eurocommunism was invisibly present in the fundamentally different interpretation of Marxism by the CPSU and PCI. Looking onto the events from this angle, the series of conflicts and the specific steps of the Soviet Union were predictable. Nevertheless, the fate of the two parties tied them in. Reflecting this, Longo remarked that "the defence of the socialist world is obviously such a problem, which should be in the focus of all communist parties, democrats, the whole developing world and progressive movements."²⁴ This comment also had double meaning, because it could be interpreted as defending either the Prague reforms or the socialism with a human face. That is why he added that "but this problem should be explored now with regard to present realities and various layers, and from the angle of present components, thus helping to find its solution. The development of each component also has different reasons." His strongest argument was the consequence of the above thoughts, the next step in the logical chain. "What are

²³ Ibid. 64.

²⁴ Ibid. 66.

the reasons of the existence and emergence of these differences of opinion, conflicts and splits? The simplest – although unsatisfactory – answer is that they are rooted in the rightist or leftist deviations of this or that kind of parties; and the solution should be sought in ‘the rigorous fight against any deviations from Marxist-Leninist principles and against nationalist, dogmatic and revisionist distortions’ – as it was written recently.”²⁵ Looking at the roots of the differences objectively, he expressed that they existed naturally between the different socialist countries as well as between communist and workers parties. He found it strange that Hermann Axen, who should have been aware of the above statements, made a critical remark in the theoretical journal of the German Socialist Unity Party (SED) concerning the PCI: “in relationships between communist and workers parties as well as with socialist countries the most important principle is not the autonomy or sovereignty of each communist parties.”²⁶

Italians, that can be understood, insisted on the opinion also expressed at the 23rd Congress of the CPSU that principles of equality, autonomy and non intervention in internal affairs of others should be strictly observed. As a conclusion, addressing it to Moscow in a not really concealed way, they renewed the “unity in diversity” principle of Togliatti. “If they really want to work on unity then they should strictly respect the autonomy of parties as well as of socialist countries and should make (actual) steps to achieve it. If these principles are revised, questioned or violated then they do not help the case of unity but induce even larger splits. *We have to start from diversity, if we want to progress towards unity.*”²⁷

Pajetta arrived in Budapest by the initiative of the PCI to talk over the events in Czechoslovakia. He arrived on September 9, 1968 and left for Rome in the morning of September 12. Over this period he met twice with Zoltán

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. 67–69.

²⁷ In October 1968, a delegation of the PCI lead by Emilio Sereni visited Moscow for a week to “exchange views with the leaders of the party education department of the CPSU”. At the same time, the delegation of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) arrived in Rome, consisting of Cvijetin Mijatović (member of the Central Committee, Secretary of Communist League of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Zvanko Grahek (member of the Foreign Department of the Central Committee). They met Pajetta, Galuzzi, Bufalini and Arturo Colombi. Ibid. 67–68, 123.

Komócsin,²⁸ on 10 and 11 September.²⁹ Pajetta emphasized that the statement of the PCI condemning the intervention was based on their established political line followed after the 20th Congress of the CPSU thus it was made by theoretical considerations not on tactical grounds. The Presidency and the Central Committee was united in making these decrees, only Donini opposed them at the Central Committee meeting but he could not argue against them. The meeting of the Central Committee rejected any attempts to fight or isolate the parties of the concerned five socialist countries. Party units discussed the stand of the Italian party at meetings and forums and generally they approved it. There were simpler party members, who said if the Soviet Union had done it then it had to have a reason for that. The visitors led by Pajetta considered the Moscow agreement as a compromise but as a positive one, and they did not want to discuss how it had been reached – indicating its conditions. “*For them it is a priority not to do anything that would not support the group in Czechoslovakia, who have signed the above agreement in Moscow.*” According to Pajetta, certain articles of *Pravda* and *Tribuna Ludu* were just making the situation even more difficult for this group. They did not know how the parties of the concerned five countries valued the group, which was in power in Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1968 or whether they regarded this group able to execute the agreement. Leaders of the PCI considered that the withdrawal of the troops of socialist countries, the restoration of the autonomy of the KSČ and its independent work were prerequisites for normalising the situation in Czechoslovakia. The Moscow agreement should be executed by both parties they said.

Their opinion on the coming (international) meeting (in Moscow) had already been told by Longo in a press interview. *The base of their thinking was that the debate arising from the different evaluation of the events in Czechoslovakia could not be avoided in the situation given that time; and it would not have a positive compromise but would sharpen the divisions and might lead to a split as the worst.*

“According to their analysis, the situation is serious and even worse than it was in 1956. They think that a decade of their work for the European safety, against the NATO and for establishing the unity of left-wing forces has been questioned, and several theoretical questions like the peaceful co-existence,

²⁸ Former anti-reformist communist politician, journalist (1923–1974). He was member of the National Assembly from 1949 until his death. (Member of the Politburo in 1957–1974, editor-in-chief of *Népszabadság* in 1961–1965, *Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the CC* in 1965–1974).

²⁹ Ibid. 292–297.

the peaceful transformation into socialism, the democracy in building socialism and the possibility of a multi-party system etc. have become problematic again. Their feelings towards the Soviet Union were shaken. The sympathy for the Soviet Union has deep roots in their party and cadres but Italian comrades feel wounded. They take this into account and they have to repair a serious damage, and we have to do this work jointly with them. They were worried of a crisis recurring in each decade. According to them, the relationship between socialist countries cast a shadow the relationship between parties. They were also worried that these countries are ready to *accept a socialist model of a certain type only*. They find us regarding the border of socialist countries the border of socialism, and we equalling these two with methods that hinder the spread of socialism. Comrade Pajetta asked again to trust in their honesty and commiseration.”

Changes in the Eastern links of the PCI at the turn of 1968-1969

The relationship between the PCI and the SED had never been characterised by harmony. Most of the conflicts of the 1960s, which were avoided or not articulated before, surfaced as they formed fundamentally different opinions on the reforms in Czechoslovakia. The communication between the two parties, which anyhow was mostly formal, got frozen by November 1968. East Germans realised the unacceptable situation rather late and by the time they finally decided to act the PCI had already solidly rejected the conflict avoiding the policy of the previous years in its theses prepared for its congress. Although late but – surprisingly – the SED made real gestures towards the party of Longo. What could have been a good proposal for negotiations years before that became pointless by the late autumn of 1968 – and not only for the chief secretary. Thirty years after the Munich Pact, when the Nazis occupied the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, destroying a state with democratic institutions, a rare exemption in Central-East Europe that time, German troops crossed the Ore Mountains again. The differences in the ideological background of the two “invasions” were obvious, nevertheless – and independent to their different consequences – they should be regarded as rude external interventions in internal affairs of a sovereign land. The PCI felt the differences in the social background of the 1956 events in Hungary and the Czech reforms, and learnt the lesson from its earlier wrong judgement on the Soviet intervention in the

Hungarian revolution, thus its answer could not be else that full seclusion from East Germany. The September plenum of the East German party condemned the policy of the PCI and anonymous brochures and flyers criticising Longo's views were sent to Italian party members living in East Germany and to organisations that could be associated with the PCI. Thus, understandably created fierce reactions in Rome, and the press controlled by the PCI was criticising not only the SED but also the GDR more sharply as ever before. In mediating between the two parties and partially restoring their links, the Hungarian Embassy in Rome contributed a lot. GDR diplomats knew that they could not reach fundamental success in restoring the damaged relations in the short term. They could hope only to renew talks but they were not able to realise this alone.

The MSZMP had also to follow a diverted path but the role of Hungary in the occupation of Czechoslovakia could not be excused, nevertheless it had made steps to avoid the invasion and to reach a peaceful solution. We can assume that the PCI was well aware and understand the situation of the Eastern parties, and their limited room for manoeuvre but it distinguished between following orders unconditionally and forced discipline. The last can be well illustrated by the meeting of Kádár and Dubček in Komárom. The Hungarian side had reasons to worry and it had actual experience about the inflexibility of the CPSU. The new economic mechanism which was announced in Hungary in January 1968 could be easily classified as parallel with the reforms in Prague. While Hungary had great hopes for the success of the attempt of its northern neighbour to renew socialism and the possible gain from accompanying marketisation – allowing market forces to work –, other ruling parties of the really existing socialism were worried about Prague breaking the unity of the European labour movement. On November 28, 1968, Kurt Schnell the second secretary commercial officer of the GDR in Rome personally informed Száll about the first deputy of foreign minister Otto Winzer. According to the report by Schnell, at the last plenum of the SED “the economic and social situation of the developed capitalist countries was analysed and based on this some statements were formed on the politics of the Italian party. They did not expect that Italian comrades would be reacting so fiercely on their announcements.” Schnell received an order to do all in order to restore good relations with the PCI. As preparation for the expected large differences in opinions, he was ordered to avoid sensitive themes thus no engagement in debates over the Czechoslovak question was recommended. Berlin suggested “discussing” a

list of topics in which both parties had similar interests or were neutral to them, thus the success in finding joint platforms was guaranteed. Schnell was also authorised to talk directly with the highest rank leaders of the PCI. So it was not just a chance that when he returned to Rome he explained his program or “peace plan” first to the Hungarian ambassador, selecting among friendly countries. The document does not reveal it but it can be suspected that he could not meet the members of the Italian Central Committee and leadership without the active help of Száll. The report of the ambassador also mentions the reasons of the conflict between the two communist parties. According to Schnell the main reasons leading to the dispute were focusing on the different interpretation of the Czechoslovak reforms, and there were other misunderstandings hindering the dialogue. It tells a lot that not even traces of self-critique can be found in reasons listed by him. A demonstrative case was when the East German news agency ADN dismissed its colleague, who was recommended by the PCI, because he was making reports on the Czechoslovak situation for the RIAS radio station in West Berlin and he also gave an account for listeners on the standpoint of the Italian party. As an answer, Rome froze all informal links with Berlin, and only lower rank party officials took part in already scheduled meetings if they took place at all. Leaders and secretaries of the PCI were totally absent.

Lessons of the Prague spring

The leadership of the PCI strictly condemned the intervention of the five member countries of the Warsaw Pact. Longo published a book on the 1968 Czechoslovak events even in the same year.³⁰ Members of the party apparatus in general approved the critique on the intervention of the five socialist countries, and only few lower rank party units declared that the announcement of the Central Committee was not well considered.³¹ In the preparation work for the 12th Congress of the party, which was held in Bologna on February 8-15, 1969 the focus was given on strengthening unity. Moving gradually towards right, the Italian Socialist Party skilfully utilised the consequences of the

³⁰ Longo, Luigi: *Sui fatti di Cecoslovacchia*. Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1968. (The book was available also in Hungary but has not been translated contrary to other works of Longo.)

³¹ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1969. 10. 16–20.

Czechoslovak developments on Italian internal politics and stole votes from the PCI. The foreign policy measures of the Soviet Union in fact were the negation of the election programme announced by Longo thus to maintain credibility the party had no other choice as really distancing itself from Moscow.

For this reason the party repeated its earlier decree in Bologna, again condemning the Soviet intervention.³² Nevertheless, neither the report on the state of affairs nor contributions from the floor analysed the problem in detail, obviously they wanted to avoid the emergence of a likely debate. The congress approved the policy of Longo,³³ thus confirmed that the decision of Togliatti was right. In the discussion itself, only few mentioned the Czechoslovak question. Most of the contributors agreed with the decrees and reports made by the governing party bodies. Member of the Central Committee Donini – supposedly by the urge of Ingrao – repeated his earlier statement supporting the legality and necessity of the intervention. Interestingly, the reformers lead by Amendola – who openly condemned the “Brezhnev doctrine” – did not react to his statements thus no relevant debate developed. Delegates of Western communist parties and of the concerned six countries from the Eastern Block expected the development of a fierce debate but due to the silence kept by the different currents opposing each other in the background, no open polemic emerged. It seems that the PCI had learnt the lessons from its experience in the preceding years, when its plurality and internal freedom did not allow it to defend a united standpoint representing the party. This time as well, representatives of the different currents had the opportunity to express their views but this only contributed additional tunes to the statements of the announcement reached by compromises. The silence of the PCI was a protest, because they did not want to share the historical responsibility of the Soviet Block. Although they avoided the sharp critique of the PCSU the speech of Enrico Berlinguer signalled of an intensifying new and more critical tone. *“The intervention in Czechoslovakia cannot be regarded as a mistake only but its roots are in the objective contradictions of the socialist world.”*³⁴ Berlinguer was rather strong

³² Ibid. 21–31.

³³ At the elections in 1963, the PCI won 7,768,228 votes in the chamber of deputies, acquiring slightly more than a quarter of the seats. Despite hardships in 1964 (the death of Togliatti and the replacement of Khrushchev), the PCI received nearly a million more votes, which was valued even by their opponents as an outstanding achievement.

in expressing the – by then – urging need for autonomy within the international labour movement. The mutual recognition and assurance of the independence of different parties became the main message of the congress. That was the way to express serious accusations – although they were not directly speaking about the suppression of the Prague spring – about the power imbalance in the family of communist parties, the main political line of the congress. This was the real indicator of the effects brought about by the Soviet intervention. Berlinguer, who enjoyed massive support in elected as deputy secretary, argued that autonomy meant the right that among others authorises the Italian communists to form an independent opinion on the measures of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries without the intention lecturing anyone on how to build ‘the actually existing socialism’. Nevertheless, they felt their duty to express their opinion without diplomatic considerations, in order to help the whole movement. They expected a far less tolerant attitude of the PCI towards Eastern Block members. At the reception held to honour foreign delegates, Berlinguer made a “*very honest and gripping*” toast: “*The PCI is a very complicated party, and sometimes it is hard to understand them. He acknowledged that they have not done all either to study socialist countries deeper and thoroughly.*”³⁵

The congress voted down with overwhelming majority the principles of a ‘leading party’ and ‘leading country’, which were also rejected by Boris Ponomarev (Ponomarev) the head of the Soviet delegation. At the same time, member of the party leadership Galuzzi, who was in charge of international affairs, strictly rejected the idea of ‘limited sovereignty’ proposed by the CPSU.

As a conclusion of a more than a week long congress, the report of the Central Committee and the closing speeches of Longo and Berlinguer were approved with overwhelming majority, only one ‘no’ was cast and 14 refrained from voting. Thus the PCI embarked on a new period in its history. As the centre-right weekly *Epoca* wrote: “Much was said about the crisis of communism but taking into accounts the facts, we have to acknowledge that the PCI has overcome a difficult period again. After the congress, its organisation and tactics were more united as ever.”³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Effects of the Prague spring on the new mechanism in Hungary and the PCI

After the suppression of the Prague spring by the rude intervention of the Soviets, the only acceptable aspect of the actually existing socialism was – at least for Italian communists – the still running new economic mechanism in Hungary, which was announced also in 1968. Following the way as the *socialism with a human face* announced by Dubček became a model of a certain public discussion for the future eurocommunist parties, the actually tested Hungarian new economic mechanism – surviving its halt ordered from Moscow – became part of the program of several Western communist parties – as empirical evidence. Nevertheless, the most important user of this experience did not come from the Mediterranean communist and workers parties but was the Chinese party, which adopted the attempt of the MSZMP realised between 1968 and the middle of the 1970s as its main line.

An intense dialogue started between the MSZMP and the PCI already in early 1968, based on the mutual exchange of experiences.³⁷ The PCI was still condemning the military intervention of the five socialist countries and still maintained its view that the ‘occupation’ of Czechoslovakia ‘means the return to old manners’ and the factual military invasion contradicts principles of equality, autonomy and not intervening into internal affairs of other parties, the principles approved together. Nevertheless, the PCI was open to Budapest.

At the end of 1968 and early 1969, Italian party leaders and the party press were emphasizing the need for normalising the given situation in Czechoslovakia. They considered normalisation not only including the full withdrawal of Soviet troops but also as they argued the full restoration of the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia (the abolition of all forms of intervention, lifting all limiting measures and demands posed and to express confidence in those in whom ‘the Czechoslovak nation trusts’.)

As a result of the above, party announcements discussed more frequently that the policy of communist parties in power were determined primarily by state interests and these were not always identical with the interests of the international communist and labour movement.

³⁷ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1969. 56. 38–39.

According to them, the conflicts developed in the past and recently in the international communist movement should not prevent the joint fight against imperialism and the unity for actions. They told the Yugoslav party delegate visiting Italy in 1968 that the PCI was lead by the aim to promote if possible mutual understanding and solving problems, which were hindering joint actions. Pajetta said on December 11, 1968 that the PCI had seen several positive signs sent by other communist parties to develop connections with them and leaders of the PCI wanted to do their best in order to restore co-operation as soon as possible.

According to the announcements issued by the party on the New Year's Day relationships with all communist parties *should be settled*, including the CPSU, the parties of the socialist countries as well as the Chinese communist party. They had great hopes concerning the attitude of the Chinese party, which seemed to be flexible to a certain extent in the questions of the Vietnam War and Chinese-US relations.

According to their interpretation, settling relationships with all communist parties would not exclude debates about problematic questions, just the opposite: examining the major reasons of conflicts and diverging opinions. They expressed that internationalism should not be discussed any more as a general idea or in abstract terms. "It should be clarified what proletarian internationalism means at the present, changed environment."³⁸

The Foreign Department of the Central Committee of MSZMP was especially positive on the speeches of the 12th Congress of the PCI. Of course, some details were sharply criticised. *"The need for respecting the almost unconditional independence and autonomy of communist parties, the excessive stress on the special national ways leading to socialism, a novel interpretation of internationalism, condemning one or other measures of the socialist countries, the continuous critique of the practice of building socialism in socialist countries – in which the PCI took a leading role – now are almost general features in the West European communist movement."*³⁹

Despite this, in the following section they concluded: "The gain of the positions of the PCI, accouting to our opinion is an inevitable and positive consequence of the policy of the PCI, which is well thought and dynamic, maximally takes into account the realities of Italy and continuously examining,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1969. 56. 13–15.

analysing and considering multifaceted social life. *We have a great opinion on the internal political line of the PCI, its flexible cooperation politics and its minimum program, which is based on structural reforms.*"⁴⁰

Kádár soon gave a long interview to *l'Unità*.⁴¹ The interview of Giuseppe Boffa with the Hungarian first secretary was published in the official journal of the CPI on Monday, December 1, 1969 – on the 3rd page with a photo. Above the title “Kádár speaks to Unità” the following sentence appeared in a box: “*the voice of a main vanguard of the Hungarian experience*”. The importance of two questions was emerging from the others, asking whether political opening might follow the Hungarian economic mechanism:

Almost two years ago a reform was launched in the Hungarian economy, which concerns all aspects of the economy and planning. Are you satisfied with the experience, and do you think that further measures would be necessary towards the same direction?

Do you think that the reforms launched in economic activities – in a very important sector in the life of a country – should be completed by reforms of other areas, especially in the sphere of political activities?

After 1968, the first official meeting of leaders of the two parties took place in Moscow at the 24th Congress of the CPSU on April 5, 1971.⁴² The MSZMP was represented by first secretary Kádár, Komócsin and Dezső Nemes,⁴³ while the Italian delegation consisted of deputy secretary Berlinguer, political bureau member Pajetta and central committee members Sergio Segre and Giovanni Carletti. In his introductory speech, Berlinguer said that in the preceding years he had been preparing for a journey to Hungary several times but due to sorrowful events the planned journey was cancelled. He was hoping that accepting the invitation he could actually travel to Budapest soon, which had been on the agenda for a long time.

Berlinguer informed the Hungarian delegation that the PCI was going to dedicate the press week organised by the Italian communist press in Torino

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. 323–324. MSZMP KB KüO Strictly confidential! Three copies only. Budapest, December 6, 1969. Content: the interview of Unità with comrade János Kádár.

⁴² Ibid. 238–242. Strictly confidential! Three copies only Moscow, April 6, 1971. Confirmed by: Zoltán Komócsin and Sándor Pamuk. (The typed document only has the signature of Pamuk.)

⁴³ Former communist politician, journalist, historian (1908–1985). He was member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

that year.⁴⁴ That time the event was planned to be held in September-October 1971. This gesture had a profound meaning, since the most supported Western communist party was planning to present the events in Hungary – also preparing for the coming local elections. After the Czechoslovak experience, the PCI was aching for presenting a positive “dissent” socialism, which could show that the reforms suggested by the Italian party were viable. Despite that the ideas of the MSZMP and the PCI were largely different. Results of the new economic mechanism, reaching its heydays that time, were acknowledged in Italy also by the broader public not only by the PCI. The agricultural cooperation agreement signed by the two countries can illustrate this, and the possible Italian participation in Hungarian motorway constructions.

The main result of the Kádár-Berlinguer meeting in Moscow was the invitation of the latter to Hungary. Accompanied by Political Bureau member Rodolfo Mecchini, Berlinguer paid his visit in Budapest on July 19-22, 1971. It was Kádár who gave an account of the talks at the meeting of Eastern Block communist leaders in the Crimea on the first two days in August 1971.⁴⁵

Differing views on the new economic mechanism of Hungary

After 1968, the Hungarian economic governance reform, which remained alone in the Eastern Block, was mostly criticised from the viewpoint of the ongoing integration of the Comecon countries. This provided an opportunity not to top condemn the whole reform, which was approached by the CPSU right from its beginning with severe reservations but to object its vital elements. Of course, the Soviet Union utilised its vantage, since Hungary conducted a third of its foreign trade with its Eastern neighbour. This trade – overwhelmingly agricultural exports – made the country of Kádár the fifth largest exporter to Moscow.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid. 238. The typed text is underlined in red in the original. (The corresponding Hungarian documents consistently named the event wrongly „the day of communist press” despite that it was lasting for a whole week. Although it was the PCI that invited the Hungarian delegation officially but Italian industrialists and capitalists were also vividly searching contacts with the representatives of Hungarian economic life.)

⁴⁵ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 54. Soviet Union (Szovjetunió). 167–175.

⁴⁶ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1972. 80. 101–116. Bulletin on the visit of the party and government delegation of the Soviet Union in the People’s Republic of Hungary

During the slightly more than two years following the intervention in Czechoslovakia, the survival of the novel Hungarian initiatives was greatly helped by the developing internal economic crisis in the Soviet Union, because its leadership was engaged in the necessary problem solving that provided a breathing space for the reformers of the MSZMP. In December 1969, Brezhnev gave a speech about the difficulties facing the economy of his land, speaking to the plenum of the CC of the CPSU. The text of the speech was not made public.⁴⁷ He referred to the slowdown in industrial growth as a worrying symptom, although it had already occurred in most of the industrially developed countries but this type of a crisis had been faced in the Soviet Union for the first time. The growth in labour-productivity fell below the necessary level, moreover, in certain industrial branches there was no expansion at all. The rise of the ubiquitously quoted 'efficacy of social production' also lost its momentum. The speech of the general secretary identified subjective and objective roots⁴⁸ of the difficulties. The slump was mostly explained by difficulties in growth but the recession was also connected to problems in extensive and intensive development policies. The proposal presented to the CC suggested employing the existing equipment and financial resources two or two and a half more intense to solve the problems. Brezhnev was sharply criticising the work of the State Planning Committee, which was unable to perform its task. The problems listed above, in fact, were neuralgic points of an outdated, over-bureaucratised thus non-transparent economic structure.

Knowing the semi-official, informal Soviet statements, it was not accidental that Rezső Nyers,⁴⁹ who was considered the father of the new economic mechanism, was accompanied by well-known anti-reformist Béla Biszku⁵⁰ in his consultative visit in Moscow in June 1971, invited by the CPSU. The Soviet delegation at the talks was lead by Andrei Kirilenko, member of the Politburo and the secretary of the CC. They discussed the long term development plans

⁴⁷ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1970. 162. 11–14. Soviet Union (Szovjet-unió). Memo of the Foreign Department of the CC of the MSZMP, Strictly confidential, only 2 copies, Budapest, March 5 1970, Mátyás Szűrös

⁴⁸ The subjective roots included organisational shortcomings and control problems in accelerating the scientific-technological progress.

⁴⁹ Former Hungarian social democratic then communist politician, economist (1923). He was member of the MSZMP's CC in 1957–1989 and the National Assembly from 1958 to 1989.

⁵⁰ Former communist politician (1921). Held the position of interior minister between 1957 and 1961. Deputy prime minister in 1961–1962, then secretary of the CC in 1962–1978.

of the Comecon-integration and the relationship between the Comecon and international organisations.⁵¹

Despite the account made by Nyers, the Soviet party leadership invariably maintained its earlier announced doubts about the theoretical and political stand of Hungary concerning its internal economical reorganisation. The Hungarian precedent, which often was called simply 'market socialism', was also rejected by Soviet academic circles. Soviet bodies asked for regular updates, which were provided, on the relationship between the need for technological developments and prices, on centralised and decentralised fixed capital formation, on the current state of the economy, the efficacy of the state governance in the economy, as well as the opinion of workers on the economic mechanism.⁵²

The study made for the Politburo reported the objections of the Soviets outspokenly:

"The Soviet delegation from time to time expresses worries that in the frame of the new mechanism the present links between the central governance and its enforcement do not provide enough guarantee that Hungary will comply with its intergovernmental duties. They mentioned this problem several times during the development phase of the long-term agreement, which was signed in 1971. The source of the problem is that several Hungarian companies, contrary to our command, in many cases do not match the contingents set by intergovernmental contracts."⁵³

Views of the Hungarian and Soviet leadership first of all differed the most – in addition to their fundamentally different opinions on the Hungarian reform – on the future development of the price system used in the mutual trade of Comecon countries. According to the Soviet view, the future development of the price system which was in place that time should take into account the internal production costs of the different Comecon countries. In the Hungarian opinion, this would have been possible only if special conditions had been met (unified pricing guidelines and methods, harmonising relative prices and the further elaboration of the exchange rate mechanism). Namely, the practice

⁵¹ In fact they criticised the dissenting Hungarian model.

⁵² Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 54. Soviet Union (Szovjetunió). 215–223. Notes by Sándor Lakos, visiting Moscow for a few days by the invitation of the Social Science Academy working for the CC of the CPSU.

⁵³ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 54. Soviet Union (Szovjetunió). 99–104. Some questions in the development of Soviet-Hungarian relations.

in pricing and cost accounting of the countries concerned differed so much at the end of the 1960s, which made impossible the direct use of internal costs and prices in setting prices for foreign trade.

In the period of 1969-1973, the MSZMP sent expert-delegates to the friendly countries of the Eastern Block and to selected countries in Western Europe (especially in Italy) where the local communist parties were relatively influential.⁵⁴ The difference between the future Eurocommunist parties and the eastern 'brother-parties' was excellently illustrated by the questions put to the Hungarian delegations and the reactions to the answers given. While the Hungarian delegates regularly were supported at the events organised by the PCI,⁵⁵ they were confronted behind the iron curtain with an ever increasing number of questions concerning the basic principles of the economic governance in Hungary, the efficacy of its economy, the independence of its companies, the non-core activity of agricultural companies, the Hungarian contribution to the economic integration of socialist countries, and the role of Western capital in reaching the economic goals set by Hungary.⁵⁶

Chinese relations of the party and the state after the Prague Spring

The diplomacy of the Kádár era Hungary, after it had settled its relationships with Western communist parties, most of all with the PCI that was discussed above, opened to China as well. The relationship between the two countries between 1949 and 1959 was 'fraternal', according to documents of Hungarian archives. In these years, top rank official visits were made mutually. János Kádár travelled to China in 1956 and a year later in 1957, Ferenc Münnich⁵⁷ and

⁵⁴ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1972. 69. Italy (Olaszország). 599–601. PCI-MSZMP cooperation for the year of 1972.

⁵⁵ The success of the new economic mechanism of Hungary in Italy was backed by the fact that the „Yugoslav model”, which beforehand had been in the focus of the propaganda of the PCI could not solve the questions also facing the Italian society, namely reducing the differences between the unevenly developed regions and prevent labour leaving the backward areas.

⁵⁶ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1972. 80. 32–33. Report of MSZMP experts on their visit in the GDR.

⁵⁷ *Former communist politician (1886–1967). Fought in the Spanish Civil War. From 1958–1961 served as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers.*

István Dobi⁵⁸ in turn paid a visit in Beijing in 1955. Concerning Chinese delegations, Zhu De came to Hungary in 1956 and 1959, while Zhou Enlai was in Budapest in 1957. The MSZMP also invited Mao Zedong and head of the state Liu Shaoqi in these years but the well-known break between the Soviet Union and China annulled the visits. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in the period indicated in the document,⁵⁹ designed for the long term but becoming a torso. From a legal point of view it remained in force, despite that after 1965 Budapest and Beijing had no official contacts in addition to diplomatic formalities. Intergovernmental relationships came to a halt, maintaining only foreign trade in specific sectors and the friendly transit transports from Hungary to Vietnam. The MSZMP initiated both in 1968 and 1970 to renew the cultural and scientific agreements, the exchange programs and the contracts between the state radios and televisions but the Chinese either evaded answering these requests or ignored them.

In the spring of 1971, a draft resolution prepared for the Politburo of the MSZMP, which was passed later, defined the following key points for a planned Hungarian-Chinese cooperation program.⁶⁰

1. In order to restore the unity of the socialist community and the international communist movement, the earlier politics of the MSZMP should be continued: on the one hand, the critique of those Chinese measures, which aim to undermine the unity of the communist movement thus hurting the case for socialism, should be continued, and on the other hand, an effort should be made for improving the intergovernmental relations – with appropriate gradual advance. Concerning intergovernmental relations, initiatives should mostly be made by using foreign trade issues.
2. In each decision related to China, careful considerations should be made to the given state of Soviet-Chinese relations and in these cases close coordination should be maintained with the Soviet comrades.

⁵⁸ Former Hungarian politician (1989–1968). Member of the left-wing fraction of the Smallholders Party. Prime Minister of Hungary in 1948–1949, *Chairman of the Council of Ministers in 1949–1952 and Chairman of the Presidential Council in 1952–1967.*

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 38. China (Kína). 436–442. Memo for the Politburo of the CC of MSZMP on the state of Hungarian-Chinese relations and proposals for expanding them

3. At Hungarian and international forums, to the necessary level, the support for the rightful requests of the People's Republic of China should be maintained (UN membership, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao).
4. The Foreign Ministry should try gradually expanding personal contacts with Chinese diplomats and the Chinese Foreign Ministry.
5. Certain Hungarian delegates travelling to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam – strictly by central instruction only – should initiate contacts with Chinese officials especially in areas of trade and scientific-technological contacts.
6. The MSZMP should continue to initiate some invitations to non-political events (exhibitions, scientific conferences).

At the same time when the rather reserved Chinese strategy which respected the foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union, was developed, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai personally received Foreign Trade Minister József Bíró⁶¹ and Ambassador Ferenc Gódor.⁶² The counterpart of Bíró, Chinese Foreign Trade Minister Pai Hsiang-kuo and deputy department director at the Foreign Ministry Li Ting-chuan also took part in the meeting, which can be interpreted as the reopening of diplomatic relations, which had been frozen ten years before. Taking into account the expectations of the CPSU – which presumably knew about the talks between Zhou and Bíró – the Hungarian Prime Minister Jenő Fock,⁶³ who played a key role in the new economic mechanism of Hungary, could not travel to China.

Zhou asked himself about the chances of a future official visit of Kádár or Fock in Beijing, and raised dozens of questions about certain aspects of the Hungarian agricultural sector, which had been laid on new foundations since the middle of the 1960s, expressing his interest in yields, the use of fertilisers, animal husbandry, the level of machinery used in agriculture but also in customs problems, the economic relationships with Austria, the development of cooperatives and state farms, putting emphasis on some questions like the

⁶¹ Former Hungarian communist politician, economist (1921). He was appointed as Minister of Foreign Trade in 1963 which position he held until 1979.

⁶² Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 38. China (Kína) 418–425. Strictly confidential! For Politburo members only

⁶³ Former Hungarian communist politician (1916–2001). From 1967 to 1975 he served as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (~Prime Minister) of the People's Republic of Hungary. Fock with Rezső Nyers and József Bálint drew up the New Economic Mechanism in the late 1967.

use of machinery in Hungary compared to Poland, the GDR and Bulgaria. He was very interested in the growth potential of the Hungarian industry, export goods and the development of the Hungarian electronic industry.

Reflecting to the courteous proposal of Bíró to improve the Soviet-Chinese relations, Zhou clearly said no but he did not close out the normalisation of the links with Hungary.⁶⁴

“Two years ago I conducted talks with Kosygin at Beijing airport. Since then negotiations have started between the two countries on the border issues that have continued now for one and a half years. We hope they will not last for 16 years, like the talks between Chinese and US ambassadors. We are prepared in this case also for the worst. Since that time Khrushchev violated the agreements, has withdrawn the experts. We will negotiate as an equal partner and we do not bear humiliation or any pressure on us. Thus we welcome very well that you have visited us. We will welcome Prime Minister Fock if he visits us... [...] Unity can develop only on a base of theoretical agreement. The Soviet Union is afraid of the US but also chums around with it. We understand what you told us but I ask you to tell them⁶⁵ it as well. The question is, whether they will listen to it or not. For example, we had reached agreements on many issues with Kosygin here but as he returned to Moscow, they altered several things. In 1964 we hoped that the new Soviet leadership would be cleverer than the old one was. That is why I went to Moscow by the commission of President Mao and the party centre. I tell you honestly, it is more difficult with the new Soviet leadership to find something in common than it was with Khrushchev. There is not even such an atmosphere for talks as it was during Khrushchev. When I was in Moscow, Khrushchev agreed, that I would be travelling to Budapest. I had interesting talks that time with comrade Kádár. There is no way now how. President Mao is right: this theoretical debate should be continued for 8,000 years.”⁶⁶

At the same time, the conflict between Khrushchev (later Brezhnev) and Mao created the theoretical base for improving the Chinese-Yugoslav relations,

⁶⁴ By this, he refuted earlier fears of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry that in the 1970s Beijing would still approach the Eastern Block as monolithic and would not be ready to talk individually with the theoretically sovereign but in fact Soviet controlled countries of East Europe.

⁶⁵ Read: to the Soviets

⁶⁶ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 38. 418–425. Strictly confidential! For Politburo members only

which was utilised – according to the given opportunities – by the countries both opposing Moscow. Since 1966, modest signals of thaw could be discovered in the relations between Belgrade and Beijing, although that time these were not going further than slightly elaborating the critique on China in the official communication of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia. In the arguments used by the leadership of Yugoslavia started to appear elements, according to which the developments in China did not fundamentally alter the socialist conditions of the Chinese society, maybe weakening them at the most. Parallely, they increasingly approved the need for analysing the internal matters of China, rather than expressing univocal critique – the earlier practice.⁶⁷

Presumably, there were two factors in this period, which affected the observably changing policy of Yugoslavia against China. First, the revitalisation of the political idea of the non-aligned movement and second, the direction of changes in the Soviet-Chinese relations, showing increasing number of signs that ideological-political conflicts caused tensions in other areas as well. All of these were catalysed by the 1968 invasion in Czechoslovakia, which was commented by the CPC with fierce anti-Soviet rhetoric. Although the announcements of the Yugoslav communist party did never recall the tone of the Chinese communists, the suppression of the Prague Spring gave a unique opportunity to increase the level of relations between the two countries to a higher standard and to expand cooperation both in ideology and practice. It is not surprising that in the time of the Sino-Soviet border conflict – in the spring of 1969 – the Yugoslav standpoint was also highly influenced by the repeatedly damaged Yugoslav-Soviet relations, becoming tense during the 1968 military action in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁸

The primary motive behind the friendship between Yugoslavia and China was an ever developing but never realised anti-Soviet platform, which provided guidelines for a future cooperation: however this was based on stepping up against Moscow rather than forming a joint alternative to it. The shaping up unity in actions against the political line of the CPSU lost its momentum

⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the 1967 Middle East Crisis overshadowed again – for a while – the growing problems in the Yugoslav-Soviet relations. It narrowed the gap between Yugoslavia and the other socialist countries thus positive elements in Yugoslav comments on China were temporarily kept back.

⁶⁸ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 38. 466–468. Development of Yugoslav-Chinese relationships, Report of the embassy in Belgrade April 7, 1971

early, because the Chinese line – despite of its anti-Soviet stand – also closed out the cooperation with Western communist parties and the political presence of Beijing in Albania, understandingly, hurt the interests of Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, tight relations and close cooperation had developed between the PCI and the Yugoslav communist party since the beginning of the 1960s.⁶⁹ Despite the problems of Yugoslavia in building socialism, the PCI regarded Yugoslavia for a long time as the initiator and forerunner of the ‘renewal’ and ‘democratisation’ of socialism. This was also expressed its party press. It often praised the achievements reached in the constructive work in Yugoslavia and in democratising social life. Weaknesses of the practice of inner politics in Yugoslavia, like the lessons learnt and mistakes made concerning the Croatian Spring were handled as secondary or negligible. The leadership of the Italian party considered only the foreign policy concepts of Yugoslavia as always dangerous, naming and criticising them at inter-party talks.⁷⁰

In the background of the Soviet-Chinese and the Soviet-Yugoslav conflicts, utilising the fact that the removal of Dubček had dramatically reduced the credibility of the Soviet Union in the eyes of the West-European communist parties, especially of the PCI, the Italian communist party made its first cautious steps towards the CPC. For the PCI the unity of the international labour movement was the first priority, and to achieve it they had a critical approach both towards the realities in the Soviet Union and in China. Nevertheless, they had never questioned the historical role of the Soviet Union and also rejected the ‘extremisms’ of Maoism.⁷¹ Although, at consultations of the large

⁶⁹ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1972. 93. 6–8. Note on the Italian-Yugoslav inter-party relationships

⁷⁰ Giancarlo Pajetta told János Kádár, at their meeting in January 1972, that he had good impressions at his visit in Yugoslavia in the summer of 1971. But Croatian student actions and party announcements and measures signalled a critical turn, of which content the PCI did not see clearly. (Pajetta often visited Budapest and he spent his summer vacation several times in Hungary. According to the personal memory of János Berecz, “it was enough to call Pajetta and he came immediately.”)

⁷¹ Nevertheless, in the eve of announcing *eurocommunism*, reflecting to the death of Mao, the *Unità* published an extensive article praising the development made by the People’s Republic of China under the guidance of Mao. In its editorial on September 10, the journal highlighted that Chinese leaders “always linked their fight with the reality of national life and the traditions of the Chinese people... and they followed the policy of national unity” – considering it one of their greatest honour.

European communist parties and at other bilateral talks, the PCI distanced itself from the dissent Chinese line undermining the unity of the movement but it started to search connections to the CPC from the end of the 1960s. The MSZMP which maintained excellent relationship with the Italian communists did it similarly.⁷² Contrary to the Hungarian party being in the Eastern Block, the PCI was able to utilise and in fact used the opportunity given by the Soviet-Chinese opposition, arguing covertly that the CPSU was also responsible for the crisis of the communist movement suffering from the lack of unity.⁷³ This was only amplified by the strict rejection of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. It is excellently illustrated by the speech given by Agostino Novella⁷⁴ at the 10th congress of the MSZMP.⁷⁵

“We believe that the Soviet Union is paying a fundamental role in the fight, which is fought by peoples against imperialist oppression and for the victory of socialism. We confirm again that we maintain solidarity with all the socialist countries, which form the most solid pillar in the fight against imperialism and for preserving peace. This solidarity of ours is the result of a fully independent analysis of the situation. And this independence is regarded by our party as a fundamental element of its politics – in case of any conditions and concerning all national or international problems, including questions emerging

⁷² Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1974. 115. 34–38. Since 1973, the PCI and the MSZMP harmonised their activities on the basis of a cooperation programme signed mutually. “There is no full theoretical-ideological unity between our parties (concepts on socialism and the transition to it) and our announced views on political issues differ temporarily or permanently (certain factors in international politics, the Czechoslovak question, the excessive Italian critique on the practice of inner politics in the socialist countries etc.). Our relationship is open, honest and – despite different views – fair and tight, debates are tolerated.”

⁷³ They shared the view of the French PCF, which also criticised the CPSU and rejected the Chinese line. However, the internal structure of the PCF resembled much more to the condemned Soviet state-party than to the PCI. Thus one of the characteristic and specific feature of the PCF was its insistence on maintaining both its right for independent critique and its alliance with the Soviet Union. This theoretical stand caused several conflict situations in the future, because its politics was based strongly both on its national identity and its loyalty to Moscow. Although, it is also true that the PCF was more dependent on Moscow, both in its traditions and financing, than their comrades in Italy.

⁷⁴ Former Italian communist politician, *syndicalist worker* (1905–1974). Between 1972 and 1974 he was one of Berlinguer’s closest advisers.

⁷⁵ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1970. 157. 138–145.

in the international labour movement as well. As a result of this, we endeavour to value the experience of the communist movement of each country in a fair way. We believe that the independence interpreted this way should be an indispensable feature of any international revolutionary party of a nation. The existence of some disagreements⁷⁶ concerning certain political problems – although sometimes they might be significant – cannot weaken the international commitment of communists and it cannot shake their unity.”

Only a year later, when Berlinguer met Kádár in Moscow – initiated by the PCI – the deputy of Longo criticised the Soviet Union sharply. According to him, there was a contradiction between the otherwise proper ideas fixed in the Soviet constitution and the practice in enforcing them.⁷⁷ On his visit in Budapest which followed his Moscow talks, Berlinguer told the leaders of the MSZMP in 1971 that the PCI had never agreed with the Cultural Revolution in China but always tried to examine and understand realities there, and it wanted to settle its relations with the CPC – while preserving its own position. In addition, he considered the improvement of relations between socialist countries, especially between the Soviet Union and China, as of primary interest. According to them, lifting the isolation of China might cause positive changes as they would be forced to lead a more realistic foreign policy in the future. Concerning the reforms in Hungary, Berlinguer emphasized that Italian communists had great sympathy for Hungary, the MSZMP and János Kádár personally. They considered the style of the Hungarian party-leadership good, especially that no superlatives and self-glorification were used concerning the well-known achievements.⁷⁸

Frequent visits of PCI leaders in Budapest and Belgrade opened a short lived window of opportunity to develop a communist alternative utilising all the different experiences. An end was put to it, when the new economic mechanism in Hungary was discredited and it was completely taken off the agenda. Despite this, the Italian, Hungarian and Yugoslav parties were able to establish viable cooperation in the examined period, due to their commitment for

⁷⁶ An ink remark on the document: „According to them, what are those?”

⁷⁷ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1971. 47. 6–7.

⁷⁸ Hungarian National Archives (MOL) M-KS 288. 32/B 1972. 69. 617–624. Report of the Foreign Department of the CC of the MSZMP, July 24, 1971 on the visit of Enrico Berlinguer and Rodolfo Mecchini, Strictly confidential.

reforms, openness to China and geographical proximity. They always respected the different limits of each other's room for manoeuvre, which allowed the Italians to maintain dissent views on the Yugoslav model and on the Hungarian reform in economic governance.

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